



VAN DYCK AND BRITAIN

18 FEBRUARY – 17 MAY 2009

TEACHER AND STUDENT NOTES

DOWNLOADABLE FULL COLOUR A4 IMAGES
WITH INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION,
DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

FOR USE IN THE GALLERY OR CLASSROOM

SUITABLE FOR TEACHERS OF KEY STAGE 3–5
AND OLDER STUDENTS

BY SARA PAPPWORTH

BRITAIN

TATE

Supported by

The ANNENBERG FOUNDATION
with thanks to Wallis Annenberg
and the American Patrons of Tate

TATE MEMBERS

Media partner

THE  TIMES

VAN DYCK AND BRITAIN

INTRODUCTION

Sir Anthony van Dyck was the most sought-after and influential painter in seventeenth-century Britain. This was despite the fact that he spent less than eight years in England. He was born in 1599 in Antwerp, Flanders, where he worked in Rubens' studio. His talents were quickly recognised, but there were already large numbers of artists competing for a few commissions in Flanders. Van Dyck left his country at the age of 21 to try his luck elsewhere in Europe. In 1620 he briefly visited London, and then went to Italy where he particularly admired the Venetian artist, Titian. Eventually, in 1632, Charles I persuaded van Dyck to return to England and become Court Painter. The King knighted him and gave him a pension and a house. Van Dyck was an instant success - his blend of a grand Antwerp Baroque style with pleasing Italianate colours and his energetic and informal approach were very popular. English patrons were not particularly interested in van Dyck's religious or mythological subjects: what they wanted were portraits. Many portraits were commissioned by the King and his large and fashion-conscious court. These portraits were widely seen and admired, leading to more demand. It is thought that during his seven and a half years in London van Dyck produced more than 400 portraits! He had a studio with at least six assistants to help him.

Van Dyck revolutionised the art of portraiture. The radiant shimmering colours of silk and satin costumes, the highly original compositions and the insightful and informal rendition of character all had a major impact. This exhibition gives us the opportunity to view some of van Dyck's most magnificent paintings (including many from private collections). It also provides a fascinating record of seventeenth-century England. In 1641, van Dyck died at the age of 42. The English Civil War and the execution of Charles I followed shortly after, bringing the world which van Dyck had so successfully described to an abrupt end.

VISITING THE EXHIBITION

Exhibition tickets for school groups of more than ten students are available in advance only at a cost of £4 per student and teacher (we ask for payment to be received two weeks before the visit). As tickets are limited it is essential to book well in advance.

To make a booking, please call the Education Bookings line on 020 7887 8888.

To avoid overcrowding in the exhibition, all groups with more than 30 students will be split into smaller groups and entry to the exhibition will be staggered at one-hour intervals.

You are welcome to use the Schools Area to have lunch or to use locker spaces; please book these at the same time as your exhibition tickets (there are a limited number of locker spaces and lunch slots available).

As all exhibitions at Tate Britain can get busy you cannot lecture in the exhibition rooms, but you can discuss works in a conversational manner in groups of no more than six students at a time. If possible, please brief your group before they enter the exhibition, and if you have a large group we recommend that you divide them into smaller groups and perhaps follow the suggestions in this pack.

ABOUT THE TEACHER AND STUDENT NOTES

This short pack is intended as an introduction to the exhibition and some of its themes and covers four works in depth, taking in the range of the show. It offers ideas and starting points for visiting teachers to use with all age groups, as well as for A-level and GCSE students to use on their own. Some of the activities or discussion points can be used as preparation for the visit, some are for use in the exhibition itself, and others are more suited to class work after your visit.

The works discussed are reproduced at A4 size so that you can print them out and use them as a resource in the classroom. The notes aim to give a few jumping-off points to explore not only the featured works but also the exhibition as a whole.

OTHER RESOURCES

In the exhibition there are an exhibition guide and a multimedia guide, which give further information about the works on display. The exhibition catalogue is available in the Tate shop, which also has a range of books, journals, postcards and other related materials. Please also see our Key Works Cards on *Portrait and Identity*.

WEBSITES

www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/vandyck

Tate Schools and Teachers www.tate.org.uk/schoolsteachers



Right image: Anthony van Dyck *Sir Robert Shirley* 1622 © Petworth House, Petworth House, The Egremont Collection, The National Trust
Left image: Anthony van Dyck *Lady Teresa*, *Lady Shirley* 1622 © Petworth House, Petworth House, The Egremont Collection, The National Trust

ANTHONY VAN DYCK *SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY 1622*

PETWORTH HOUSE, THE EGREMONT COLLECTION, THE NATIONAL TRUST, OIL ON CANVAS

ANTHONY VAN DYCK *TERESA, LADY SHIRLEY 1622*

PETWORTH HOUSE, THE EGREMONT COLLECTION, THE NATIONAL TRUST, OIL ON CANVAS

These two early portraits are the only examples in this exhibition that date from van Dyck's time in Italy (1621–27). Although he was only 23 when he made them, they show that he was already a very competent and confident artist. He adopts the sumptuous colours of Venetian paintings to create his own unique and visually arresting style. The couple are striking in their dazzling and exotic red, gold and silver robes, which shimmer against the dark background. Here we see why van Dyck is so famous for his rendition of textiles. The sheen of silks and satins, the softness of velvets and the weight and ornate raised patterning of brocades are all palpable. It comes as no surprise to discover that van Dyck's father was a silk merchant: he would have grown up learning to appreciate the feel and value of beautiful fabrics.

It is also very appropriate that Sir Robert Shirley should have been painted wearing silk, since as European diplomat for the Shah of Persia (now Iran) he negotiated contracts for Persian silk exports. Sir Robert habitually wore this ceremonial Persian dress, which clearly fascinated van Dyck, who made several annotated drawings of it. In this painting however, van Dyck decided to concentrate on its overall effect. The figure, unlike most English portraits of this period, is shown full length, practically bursting out of the frame. He appears impatient to leave the scene, with his cloak half off his shoulders, one foot forward, holding a bow and arrow. His face, however, remains still and stern. This interest in capturing the character of the sitter is typical of van Dyck and contrasts with the other portrait of Sir Robert in this exhibition, by an unknown English artist, which, though detailed, looks stiff, and unreal. Whilst Sir Robert appears active, serious and purposeful, Lady Teresa Shirley sits, immobile, with a demure half smile on her face. Her dress is also exotic, but not particularly Persian. She does however have a pet monkey and is sitting on a Persian carpet. This interest in Oriental objects and costume is something that became very popular a hundred years later with 'Orientalist' art: once again, van Dyck was ahead of his time.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Do Sir Robert and Lady Shirley look good in their costumes? Why? Imagine you could choose to wear the traditional costume of another country. What costume would you choose to wear and why?
- Do you think Sir Robert was a tough negotiator? What makes you think this? How would an equivalent trade negotiator try to sell their goods in England today?
- It is hard to imagine what it was like nearly four hundred years ago to pose for van Dyck. How do you think Sir Robert and Lady Shirley found the experience and do you think they were pleased with the way they were represented?
- Investigate how silk is made, including the role of the silk worm.

ACTIVITIES

- Hats and head coverings can completely transform a person's appearance and send out a particular message about who they are or how they feel about themselves. Working with a partner, photograph one another wearing two very different headdresses or hats. What impact do they have on how you look and what you are saying about yourself?
- Sir Robert Shirley strides forward, dominant and powerful. In contrast, his wife sits demure and submissive in a pose reminiscent of Renaissance Madonnas. Think about this gender stereotyping and how the poses, facial expressions and exotic costumes contribute to its effect. With a partner role play Sir Robert and Lady Shirley, adopting their poses and attitudes. Now imagine that you are a 21st-century couple. Would you be likely to have a similar relationship? Adjust your role play accordingly.
- Make a viewfinder: take a small rectangle of card and cut a rectangular hole in the middle. Select a portion of Sir Robert or Lady Shirley's clothing where you think the colours and patterning of the fabric are interesting. Hold your viewfinder up to focus on this section. Use a photocopier to enlarge this part of the image up to A3 format and create your own design from this. Think of some ways of personalising this design by adding further decorative details or consider using different colours. Look at the feel of this pattern. How could you transform it to make it look more modern?



Anthony van Dyck *Charles I on Horseback with M. de St Antoine* 1633 The Royal Collection
© 2009, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

ANTHONY VAN DYCK *CHARLES I ON HORSEBACK WITH M DE ST ANTOINE* 1633 HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN (THE ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST), OIL ON CANVAS

Charles I was a connoisseur of both the visual arts and the theatre. He was also well aware that the arts could be used as a propaganda tool. He found an ally in van Dyck who painted bold images that emphasised Charles' power. This very large painting was made soon after van Dyck was asked by Charles I to become Court Painter. It is theatrical, with vibrant colours, dramatic movement, striking composition and a stage-like setting. Clearly this visually arresting painting is designed to send out a strong message of regal power. Charles I believed he had a divine right to rule. Although he was small (about 1.62m or 5ft 4in) the King is made to look tall and imperious on top of his white horse, with his equerry gazing up at him in admiration. King Charles has effortless mastery of his steed as he gently guides him through the arch. This symbolises his command of his kingdom and its people and the ease and skill with which he governs. His armour is of a type which was used in jousting, thus indicating that this is not simply a king prepared to lead in battle but also one who would do so following the ancient chivalric traditions of English knights. To the left of the painting lies a large shield showing the arms of England and Scotland, two once separate kingdoms that Charles' father, James I, had brought together.

The equestrian portrait has a long tradition in Italy, but it was practically unheard of in Britain. Charles I was a celebrated horseman. van Dyck used the equestrian format to amplify the King's skill and authority and to give a sense of historic destiny. Since images of a mounted ruler were a strong tradition from the Roman era it is no coincidence that the King and his steed are shown walking towards us through a grand Roman arch.

This painting was designed to be hung at the end of a large gallery in St James's Palace alongside paintings by Titian and portraits of Roman rulers. It would have been widely seen by the two and a half thousand courtiers that formed Charles I's massive entourage, as well as by their families. Thus, this painting was highly influential, both as an artwork and a royal message. It is very significant that 22 years later, after the defeat and execution of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell chose to have himself portrayed in an identical format. In Peter Lombart's mass-produced engraving *Oliver Cromwell on Horseback with a Page*, Cromwell had his artist propagandist make a copy of this painting, but replace Charles I's head with his own!

FOR DISCUSSION

- Find examples of modern leaders who use images of themselves as propaganda. In what ways are they similar or different to van Dyck's image of Charles I? Do you think that images are more powerful than words? Why have they been used to convey strong political messages in war times or by despotic regimes? Look at examples of posters from the Second World War and ask yourselves how you would have reacted had you lived in those days.
- The landscape backgrounds that appear in many of van Dyck's paintings are imagined rather than real. What do you think their function is and what mood do you think this landscape gives to this equestrian portrait of Charles I?
- This painting is dated 1633 on the ledge just above the shield. However, it is not signed. In fact, van Dyck never signed his paintings. Why do you think this was and what problems might it create for art historians and the art market?

ACTIVITIES

- Make a portrait of a modern day celebrity using digital collaging and photo manipulation. What are the modern equivalent of the horse and symbolic objects shown here?
- Working with some friends, make a portrait of your head teacher that is as large as this one! Try to think of a place to display where you could link elements of the painting with the place where it will be exhibited. How long did it take to make? Was the process straightforward? What are the advantages/disadvantages of large paintings? Has the painting changed your perception of the space where it is displayed?
- Music was as important as art to Charles I and his Court. Try to compose your own triumphal music based on this equestrian portrait. Think of five words to describe how this painting makes you feel. Notice the posture of the figures, the bold colours and strong contrasts of light and dark as well as the overall scale. Working in a group, think of how to translate these visual elements into sounds. What sort of instruments, rhythms, volume and musical style might best describe Charles's triumphal entry on his white horse?



Anthony van Dyck *Self-Portrait: Van Dyck and Endymion Porter* about 1633
© courtesy Museo Nacional del Prado, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

ANTHONY VAN DYCK VAN DYCK AND ENDYMION PORTER ABOUT 1633 MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PRADO, MADRID, OIL ON CANVAS

The 'Friendship Portrait' was another type of image that van Dyck introduced to England from Continental Europe. Van Dyck would have been familiar with Titian's double portrait of Cardinal Georges d'Armagnac and his secretary (1536–9), from the collection of the Duke of Buckingham. The Titian portrait employs a similar format to this one of one frontal figure and one in profile, with a part-interior, part-landscape background. Friendship Portraits are always of two male figures. Although they are friends or associates their close relationship is, paradoxically, denied within the portrait, where they are viewed in a disconnected and contrasting fashion. The Friendship Portrait went on to become very influential with English artists, including Joshua Reynolds.

Endymion Porter was a favourite of Charles I who acted as an intermediary between the King and the Spanish Court. He was a friend of van Dyck and had been influential in helping him gain favour with the King. This is one of several portraits of Porter by van Dyck, but the only one that shows the two men together. Despite this, it follows the tradition of making the two figures appear strangely unrelated. They seem unaware of one another's presence. Porter is slightly larger, he faces forward and stands against a landscape background whilst van Dyck's slighter figure appears against a curtain, in profile and dressed in black. Perhaps these contrasts serve to underline the men's differing social status or their different characters. However the unusual horizontal format and oval frame help to unite the two figures visually.

Seventeenth-century London was the age of the dandy or 'fop'. Men were very fashion conscious and they spent huge sums of money on their clothing. Contemporary reports complain about the effeminate style of many men's appearance, notably the length of their (generally curled) hair, their silk shoes and stockings, decorative swords and ostentatious jewels. They often wore a single pearl earring! Within this context van Dyck's appearance is quite restrained, but judging from other self-portraits, he did love to wear far more luxurious clothing than was common for artists at this time. His hair and moustache are certainly self-consciously elegant. Endymion Porter's outfit is a perfect example of high fashion with his satin waisted doublet, breeches, silk ribbons and extensive Flemish bobbin lace. It was an era of conspicuous consumption, in which showing your wealth through your dress was considered desirable. Although van Dyck shows less precise detail of the clothing than most other Flemish and English artists at the time, his fluid brush-strokes suggest its tactile qualities - in particular the watery smoothness of Porter's white satin as the light falls upon it. The conscious play of gestures is also important here. Porter's hand on hip, van Dyck's elbow thrusting into the picture surface and the way he turns his head around to look over his shoulder, add dynamism. These were devices van Dyck often used and which were later copied by his successors.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Why is this called a 'Friendship Portrait'? Do they look like friends? What would you change to emphasise the closeness of their relationship?
- Do many men spend a lot of time and money on their appearance nowadays? Do you think the age of the dandy has returned? If so, is it a good thing? What do you think about the influence of external appearances on us? Look at a range of photos of people dressed differently and ask yourselves what affect their various styles have on you. Discuss your findings in a group. Are some people more influenced by appearance than others? How do age, cultural background and ethnicity affect the way we perceive things?
- In what ways do artists approach a self-portrait differently from a portrait? It may help to compare portraits with self-portraits by other artists such as Reynolds, Rembrandt, Freud and Lowry. Who are the self-portraits and portraits made for? Does it have an impact on the end result? What were the constraints on artists in the seventeenth century? What are they now?

ACTIVITIES

- Pose and gesture often suggest as much about character as facial expression. The way Endymion Porter puts his hand on his hip, for example, suggests that he is pleased with himself. Play a game with a partner: take it in turns to think of a pose which reveals a particular character. Take up the pose and ask your partner to guess what character you had in mind, then swap round.
- The shape, design and colour of a frame can all make a big difference to how an image appears. Too often we use rectangular frames, without considering alternatives, but this painting is in an oval frame. Choose a postcard or print of a painting that you like. Try drawing or making different shaped and styled frames for it. Notice how they transform its overall appearance.
- In practical terms it is not easy to paint a self-portrait. In this picture van Dyck appears to look back over his shoulder into a mirror that is placed behind him. The difficulty with this method is that as he examines his reflection he is looking in the opposite direction to his painting. Have a go at this yourself. It may be easiest to start by making a drawing. Get comfortable so that you can keep the same position and retain a good view of your reflection. Although you will need to look at your drawing from time to time, try to concentrate on looking at the reflected image.



Anthony van Dyck *Portrait of the Artist's Wife, Mary Ruthven, Lady van Dyck* about 1640
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

ANTHONY VAN DYCK PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S WIFE, MARY RUTHVEN, LADY VAN DYCK ABOUT 1640

MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PRADO, MADRID, OIL ON CANVAS

This painting was around 1640, soon after van Dyck's marriage to Mary Ruthven. She was eighteen and he was 40! Mary Ruthven was the daughter of a Scottish nobleman and was probably Maid of Honour to the Queen. She was said to have been very beautiful. Sadly, they were only married briefly. Soon after the birth of their daughter in 1641, van Dyck died.

The animated and informal nature of this painting, together with its comparatively small size, suggests that it is an intimate piece made by van Dyck for his personal use. Mary's face is particularly striking. Her eyes demand our attention, even though she is not facing us directly. The three-quarters view has the effect of making the figure look like she is in the midst of conversation with us and in the process of moving her head to follow us as we walk to the right. Combined with the half-smiling mouth this is what might be described as a 'come hither look'. Also suggestive of an animated conversation are her long, slender fingers that appear to be counting the lapis and gold rosary around her wrist. This marks Mary as a Catholic. Van Dyck was also Catholic but at this time Britain was divided between its many Catholics and the Protestant King and his followers.

Mary's bright silk dress is striking against the dark ground. Its light shade of blue was to become very popular amongst van Dyck's successors, notably Thomas Gainsborough. Even more striking is the informality of the dress. In a time where ladies wore tight bone corsets and lace coverings to neck and wrist (to show their status and cover their cleavage), Mary's lack of lace or corset and her low-cut dress make this an extraordinarily intimate portrait. Moreover, although desirable attributes of a woman in the seventeenth century were "chaste beauty, purity and command of the passions", this portrait appears to express a passionate relationship. The gesture of her hands and broad waistline may also indicate that she was pregnant when this painting was made.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Mary Ruthven was said to be very beautiful but ideas of beauty are personal and change from one period to another. Do you think that she is beautiful? Do you think she looks nineteen? What is similar and what is different about her and her clothes from a beautiful nineteen-year-old girl today?
- We know Mary Ruthven was Catholic because she holds a rosary. What symbols or objects, religious or otherwise, would you like to appear in your portrait and what would they say about you?
- Van Dyck's style of painting women in a far less formal manner than was done previously was very influential on later artists. Look at the portraits from eighteenth-century artists such as Reynolds and Gainsborough through to Sargent and Laszlo in the early twentieth-century. Notice ways in which their portrayal of women are similar and ways that they are different.

ACTIVITIES

- Write a dialogue between yourself and Mary Ruthven. Imagine what she might be interested in talking about and what her views might be.
- Make an artwork dedicated to someone you love! It could be a painting, poem, drawing, photograph or even a piece of music. However you choose to make it remember to use that medium to express your love: for example, warm colours, symbolic objects or poetic images. Work it out carefully and be imaginative!
- How might this image look if it were used as part of an advert, comic scene or book cover? What might Mary Ruthven advertise? What could be the title of a book cover on which she featured? What cartoon or comic scene would she be a part of? Create your own advert, comic scene and book cover based on Mary Ruthven's portrait. Make three photocopies of this painting. Work out how you could adapt the portrait and what text you might add. Remember to make the text style and scale appropriate and be adventurous in how you alter the painting.